

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole-School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**  
**REPORT**

**Belvedere College S.J.**  
**Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1**  
**Roll number: 60520P**

**Date of inspection: 16 January 2012**



# **Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2012 in Belvedere College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

## ***Introduction***

Belvedere College has been based in its present location since 1841 and has a current enrolment of 1003 boys. The school offers the Junior Certificate (JC), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate (LC).

## **1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- The board of management is effective and shows great commitment to the school.
- Senior management provides strong leadership and work as an effective team.
- The school's mission and ethos are central to all decision making.
- The quality of whole-school planning is very good.
- Teachers have engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) and this is supported by senior management.
- A high level of care for student welfare is evident.
- A good range of academic subjects is offered.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good with some exemplary lessons visited.
- The school has responded well to recommendations made in previous evaluations.
- Self-evaluation is embedded in the culture of the school.

### ***1.2 Recommendations for Further Development***

- The school should work towards an increased provision of timetabled Physical Education.
- A constitution should be drawn up setting out clear, democratic procedures for the election of student council officers.
- Subject plans should link student learning outcomes with details on teaching resources, modes of assessment and teaching methodologies in an integrated way.
- Each subject department should develop agreed practices in relation to the frequency of monitoring students' work and the provision of written feedback.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

The board of management is appropriately constituted and presented as an informed body, committed to the school's mission statement and the development of the college as a centre of learning. Belvedere College is a Jesuit school and very strong links are maintained with the trustees. The Jesuit philosophy and a strong Catholic ethos influences all decisions made by the board. Board members have received specific training with regard to serving on a board in a Jesuit school and on the workings of a board of management.

The school's priorities for development are focussed and coherent. A clear strategic plan was developed by the previous board of management and this is being implemented by the current board. Various sub-committees are in place to pursue the strands within the plan. A strategy sub-committee, chaired by an independent facilitator, coordinates this work and ensures that all activities are informed by the college's mission statement and that targets are met. As part of its review process, the board compares end-of-year feedback from each sub-committee against objectives set out in the strategic plan. This is very good practice.

The board has been actively engaged in modifying and adjusting the school's admissions policy to ensure clarity and equity in the processes around the entry of new students to the school. During the evaluation it was unclear whether the school's Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy had been ratified by the board. It is recommended that the existing policy be updated in line with guidelines published by the Department.

The board is kept informed of ongoing school activities through the headmaster's report and a report from the Parents' Association (PA). The chairperson of the board and the headmaster hold monthly meetings. As is good practice, an agreed report is communicated to the teaching staff and the parents' association following each board meeting.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

The PA actively engages in the organisation and funding of many school activities. Its members are appropriately consulted in policy formation. As a support for the parent body, the PA organises talks on topical issues as well as social evenings in the College. Parent volunteers contribute time and skills to a wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular events. These and many other contributions to the life of the school are highly commended.

### ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

#### **Leadership of staff**

The senior management team consists of the headmaster, the deputy principal and a school-funded assistant-deputy principal. All three are deeply committed to the school and share a common understanding of the school's mission. Communication within the team is good with roles and duties clearly defined. The headmaster is charged with leading and managing all the school partners and resources to create the best possible educational experience for the entire school population. The deputy principal and assistant-deputy principal have an

active on-the-ground presence in the college and collaboratively manage the day-to-day running of the school. All the parents who responded to the questionnaires agreed that the school is well run.

Currently among the staff, there are seven assistant principal and fifteen special duties post-holders. To supplement this provision, the school funds a further twelve assistant principals and twenty-eight special duties posts. The duties of post-holders are assigned based on the needs of the school and on the abilities and skills of the post-holders. Posts are regularly reviewed with school-funded posts having short-term contracts.

A significant number of the school's posts are invested in the pastoral care system. Returns from questionnaires indicate that almost all parents agree that their son feels cared for in the school. It was evident that post-holders also contribute significantly to the coordination and administration of co-curricular activities. Formal meetings are scheduled twice per term between assistant-principal post-holders and senior management. This is establishing a middle-management identity in the school. Other post-holders have a meeting with the headmaster once per year.

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. It was evident that there is an ongoing and long-established process of school development planning. Planning is both collaborative and consultative with all appropriate members of the school community involved.

The CPD of staff is fully supported by management. The effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), the Key Skills programme formulated by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and Teaching and Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are examples of current areas of focus. This good work is commended with evidence of its positive effect observed during classroom visits. It is suggested that future professional development should prioritise the areas of assessment for learning (AfL), cooperative teaching and differentiation.

A comprehensive and effective two-year induction process is in place for new staff. The headmaster observes a number of lessons and provides written feedback to the teacher. Established teachers provide additional peer support. All new staff must also complete in-school ICT training.

The school's enrolment policy is clear and contains prioritised criteria for admission. Up to fifteen places per annum are reserved for boys entering through the college's Social Diversification Programme. Under this scheme, priority is given to those from a social and economically deprived background.

The code of behaviour is positive in tone and is based on respect. An underlying theme is the encouragement of students to amend unacceptable behaviour. Of the students surveyed through questionnaires, almost all agree that they understand the school rules. The behaviour of students during the evaluation was exemplary.

The College has a well-developed pastoral care system with significant resources devoted to the holistic development of students. Each class is assigned a form tutor who generally remains with the same class group as they progress through the school. Tutors provide continuity of care and act as advocates for their students. A comprehensive account of individual students' academic and personal progress is compiled by tutors and distributed to parents twice per annum. The provision of such detailed feedback to parents is commended.

Year heads have some pastoral duties and are responsible for most disciplinary functions. The role is specific to year, not student group, and a formal transfer from one year head to another occurs annually. The college believes that this system allows year heads to become specialists in the administrative and pastoral requirements of specific year levels. It is suggested that the school keep this system under review. There are many pastoral advantages for students, parents and form tutors in allowing year heads to remain with the same group of students as they advance through the school.

The prefect system provides a further layer of support to students. Prefects are appointed by the headmaster and are drawn from the incoming sixth-year group. Two prefects are assigned to each class group in first and second year. They meet their designated class every morning and contribute to the care of students. This delegation of leadership to students is very good. Those appointed as prefects have a high profile in the college and are seen as very good role models.

A care team has been established in the school to formalise and co-ordinate interventions put in place for students needing extra care. A wide variety of skills is represented on this team and good systems are in place to discreetly provide additional support. The work of this group is commended and is further evidence of the importance placed by the school on the welfare of its students.

Incoming first-year students complete a full week of induction before the academic year begins. The year head, form tutors, prefects and guidance councillor, amongst others, provide this service to facilitate a smooth transition for students from primary to post-primary education. Students make their subject choices before entry into the school. There is good flexibility built into this system to allow students to switch subjects.

The TY programme offers students a wide variety of activities including work experience, an exchange programme, community service and charity work. A very positive feature of the year is the monthly awards system designed to motivate students. Best practice is followed with an ongoing review of the programme which includes feedback from students. This has resulted in changes in the programme from year to year.

An effective system is in place to provide support to students with special educational needs (SEN). Five teachers form the main SEN team, all of whom have qualifications and experience in special educational needs. Students may be withdrawn on an individual basis if they are exempt from a particular subject or from a non-examinable subject, if appropriate. Small group work and some co-operative teaching also take place. Good communication is maintained between mainstream teachers and the SEN team to ensure that all teachers have the necessary information regarding students' needs and learning styles.

In general, timetabling provides sufficient and suitable class contact time for most subjects, in line with syllabus requirements. It is recommended however that the school revisit the timetabling arrangements for Physical Education and work towards increasing the timetabled provision of Physical Education for students as recommended in *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*.

Students at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels are offered a good range of academic subjects. Members of the SEN team initiated the introduction of Home Economics at senior cycle as an alternative subject for students with language exemptions. This is a positive move. The school is now urged to consider the introduction of technical subjects into the curriculum.

The school is justifiably proud of its social justice initiatives. A very wide array of activities are undertaken by students including, amongst others, the ‘Sleep-Out’ for the homeless at Christmas, peer tutoring in local primary schools and the ‘Block Pull’ during the summer. Such co-curricular activities are central to the nature and character of Belvedere College and to the development of students as ‘persons for others’.

Self-evaluation is embedded in the culture of the school. The headmaster promotes evaluation, review and target setting by providing a Subject Improvement Plan template to all subject departments. The senior management team liaises with subject departments twice per annum to monitor progress. A very detailed and comprehensive analysis of results is carried out and students’ grades are tracked as they progress through the school. This information is provided to students and parents at Christmas and summer. Parents are invited to provide written feedback to the school after each report. Student questionnaires are used to provide feedback and students on occasions are invited to reflect on their own work and to set realistic targets for their future achievements. In some subject areas, teachers are facilitating peer observation as a means of evaluating teaching and learning. All these good practices reflect openness to change and a willingness to listen.

A student council has been established in the school and is supported by a liaison teacher. The council communicates with the general school body through the council notice board, email and through year group representatives. These representatives are not formally elected but are selected from students who express an interest. It is recommended that the current constitution be changed to set out clear, democratic procedures for the election of student council officers.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

The school accommodation consists of both modern and period buildings and is maintained to a high standard. A welcoming atmosphere and a true sense of history are accentuated by the display of photographs and memorabilia of significant events in the school’s past. The standard of cleanliness throughout the school and the recent achievement of the Green Flag are indicators of the respect shown to the school by the students. Of the students surveyed, almost all believe that facilities in the school are good.

Subject areas are very well resourced. Teachers have good access to ICT equipment to aid teaching and learning and all rooms are supplied with a digital projector and a desktop computer. The introduction of ePortal to assist in recording students’ attendance and performances is planned but necessitates the upgrading of the school’s network. Work is progressing in this area.

Senior management has recently restructured the allocation of classrooms to facilitate teacher-based rooms where possible. Many teachers have taken the opportunity provided to improve the learning environment by displaying charts, posters and some students’ work.

## **3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### ***3.1 The quality of learning and teaching***

Thirty-two lessons were observed during the evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with some exemplary lessons visited. Responses to questionnaires indicate that almost all parents agree that teaching is good in the school. In most lessons the teacher highlighted the intended learning outcomes at the start of the class.

Very good practice was noted in lessons where the aims of the lesson were stated explicitly in terms of student learning outcomes. This approach helped to engage students and ensured that lesson time was used in a productive and purposeful manner.

Effective planning and preparation for lessons was a feature of almost all lessons. This included the preparation of information handouts, ICT presentations, experiments and question sheets. These were well integrated throughout lessons to support student learning and were often used as a trigger for student activity in areas such as discovery learning, student discussion or student explanation. In some lessons, where there is a wide range in students' abilities, teachers need to further develop differentiated worksheets and handouts as well as a strategic approach to the use of pair work and group work.

ICT was incorporated into almost all lessons visited and contributed significantly to students' learning. The sharing of teaching resources among staff is facilitated by using subject folders on the school's server. The school is also at the early stages of introducing 'Moodle' as an added support for students. This good work is commended. Most subject departments have already identified the increased use of ICT in teaching and learning as an important target within their planning documentation.

Participation in the Key Skills programme started in the school three years ago and has developed progressively since. There is clear evidence of the impact of work in this area. During the evaluation, the inspectorate team observed some good examples of teaching methodologies being used to promote the development of the student as an independent learner. Teachers selected activities which engaged students in their own learning and promoted self-directed learning. This use of active and co-operative methodologies emphasised the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning.

Students' homework and class copybooks were examined during classroom visits. Good levels of work were evident and in almost all cases, this work was regularly monitored. Best practice saw written formative feedback provided to students on their work. In some cases however, little or no written feedback was provided to students. It is recommended that each subject department should develop agreed practices in relation to the frequency of taking up students' work and the provision of written feedback, in line with AfL principles.

Teachers were open to constructive feedback which demonstrates a very positive attitude to their professional development and a real commitment to improve the students' learning experiences.

## **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

### ***4.1 Management***

The school's response to the four most recently published subject inspection reports for the school were taken into consideration during this evaluation. School management have systematically addressed the recommendations made relating to subject provision and whole-school support.

### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

Many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports relate to subject department planning and the need to formulate this planning in terms of student learning outcomes. From the examination of planning folders it was evident that subject planning

has been ongoing and that progress has been made in this area. To bring this process forward, it is recommended that a common template be developed to encourage a whole-school approach to subject planning: the aligned of this template with the Subject Improvement Plan should be considered. Schemes of work should link student learning outcomes for each topic with specific details on teaching resources, modes of assessment and teaching methodologies. The structuring of the schemes of work in this integrated way will facilitate improved collaboration and discussion within subject departments and the wider use of common assessments at Christmas and summer. The embracing of ICT by teachers and the existing good practice of sharing teaching resources should enable these schemes to grow in an organic fashion.

## **5. THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

A strong feature of Belvedere College is its openness to change and its ongoing development of reflective practices. Self-evaluation is embedded in the culture of the school and has led to the identification of priorities for improvement and the setting of clear targets to achieve change. Sound processes have been implemented including the administration of questionnaires, the facilitation of regular feedback from parents and students and the very detailed tracking and analysis of student attainment in both house and state examinations. The best way forward for the school is discussed openly, keeping the evolving needs of the student cohort central to the decision-making process. The willingness to seek the opinions and views of all the educational partners reflects a school which is confident in its abilities to implement improvements in the delivery of education to its students.



## **Appendix**

### **School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The college wishes to thank the Inspection Team for the manner in which the inspection was carried out. It was an affirming experience that further developed the existing self-evaluation procedures in the College.

The comments on self-evaluation (pg 6) are particularly welcome because it highlights the openness to change that is vital in a learning organisation, “which is confident in its abilities to implement improvements in the delivery of education to its students” (pg. 8)

At the heart of Belvedere College S.J. is a desire to nurture a love of learning and to foster values that encourage all members of its community to engage in developing a more just society. “The school is justifiably proud of its social justice initiatives.”(pg 5). Each child is valued and cared for and the very positive comments regarding Pastoral Care are very welcome. They also commended the Care Team and S.E.N. staff (pg5).

The College has acted upon the suggestions and recommendations of the M.L.L. Inspection Team and this is reflected in the Improvement Plans for each area in 2012/13.

## **Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

As regards the recommendations, note the following actions have been taken.

- The draft template for subject plans has been issued to departments. Subject departments have begun the process of mapping the curriculum on an agreed template that links learning outcomes, teaching resources, methodology, assessment and key words.
- Similarly, each department is working on their assessment procedures to include agreed practices in relation to the frequency of monitoring students work and the format of written feedback.
- The Student Council Constitution has been updated to include the recommendations and dates for elections are in the College Journal. Elections took place at the beginning of this academic year. Year Heads/Form Tutors are to make arrangements for feedback to the Student Council.
- Annually there is a comprehensive review of the curriculum offered to students. We are exploring the student options with regard to technical subjects, Home Economics and Physical Education.
- The RSE policy has been updated in line with D.E.S. guidelines and has been ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting in May 2012.